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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NDJAMENA 000291

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SUBJECT: SUDANESE REBELS STILL A LONG WAY FROM UNIFYING

REF: NDJAMENA 70

Classified By: S/CRS Charles Wintermeyer for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. NRF officials, including two ex-pat political representatives from the UK, indicated frustration at the slow progress of unifying the Sudanese rebels in a meeting with them April 4. They said they see the United States as an important friend and ally and urged diplomatic pressure to encourage the rebel groups to unite for negotiations on a Darfur settlement. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Tadjadine Bechin Niam, National Redemption Front (NRF) Secretary for Reconstruction and Development, and also its representative to the AU, met with Ambassador and PolOff on 4 April. He was accompanied by Bahar Idriss Abougonda, Vice Chairman, Secretary for Darfur; Professor Mahamoud Suliman Abaakar, Deputy Chairman of the General Congress, and Dr. El-Thair El-Faki, Speaker for the UK and Ireland. Abaakar, a psychiatrist, and El-Faki, a surgeon, both based in London, were finishing up a short trip to meet the NRF's military forces and brief them on what the political side of the NRF was doing, and also assisting them with medical care.

Niam emphasized that Khalil Ibrahim (now in Sudan) wanted them to have this appointment with the Ambassador.

JEM Not Islamist

¶3. (C) The delegation thanked the United States for its support, and helping to publicize the plight of the Darfur people. They described the United States as an important friend and ally for their movement. They claimed they were peace-loving but that they felt war was necessary, adding that President Bashir would not negotiate with anyone who was unwilling to fight for their cause. They also claimed to be "bitter" that the U.S. portrayed the JEM as an Islamist or jihadist movement, which they claimed was not in fact true. However, they noted there had been some Islamists in the JEM in the past, and that some JEM members have their own "regional agenda" in addition to the JEM's national agenda.

Not Seeking Independence

¶4. (C) Niam stated the JEM was "happy" that the South had achieved the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and that they would try to help make it work. However, for the JEM, he described its goal as a CPA without independence from Sudan. Their objective was to remain part of Sudan, but no longer be marginalized. One idea he proffered was for each of the six parts of the country to take turns leading for five years, so that no part of the country would be marginalized (Note: The EU alternates leadership in a similar manner, but Niam's proposal would have a 30 year cycle. End Note.).

Unification Still A Long Way Off

¶15. (C) Niam admitted frustration at the lack of progress in unification, and observed that time was running out. The delegation suspected some international organizations and regional powers (whom they would not identify) of opposing rebel unity and secretly supporting President Bashir. The political leaders asked that the United States apply diplomatic pressure on splinter groups and on these suspect organizations and states to get them to support rebel unification.

¶16. (C) Niam estimated that the NRF was about 65-70 percent unified, but that the 13 elements within the SLA were still fragmented. The delegation complained that there was some NRF participation in an ongoing SLA Commanders Conference, but that political leaders were not included along with military leaders. Supposedly Abdul Shafi participated in the meeting, which Khamis and Adam Bakhit claimed was "illegal." They said Sharif Harir is also attending the meeting in a bid to take on a leadership role. However, Niam claimed these leaders were still working together along with Adam Shogar.

¶17. (C) Niam claimed the SLA wanted the chairmanship and the military leadership of a unified rebel movement, which he felt should rest with the JEM. He also expressed hope that the status of things would be "clearer" in seven to ten days, and said that a JEM-NRF joint statement would be coming out.

¶18. (C) The doctors noted the need to move on a political as well as a military track, and noted that most political leaders came from the Darfur Diaspora (Note. After the

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meeting, in response to Poloff, they indicated it had been decades since they personally had last been in Darfur before this visit. End note).

Diplomatic Considerations

¶19. (C) Niam said the JEM had told Special Envoy Elliason that they would accept him as a mediator. However, he said he had warned him that the African Union (AU) has no credibility in its view, since it "failed" by coming up with the DPA. However, he did state that part of the DPA was acceptable. He also claimed the JEM was ready to attack militarily, although ready to enter negotiations. Concerning the UN, the JEM supports a UN force only if there is a peace treaty first (not the DPA).

¶10. (C) Niam once again criticized the February conference held in Tripoli, saying there was no substantive plan; the attendees were just 'herded' there. However, there is a follow-on plan to continue negotiations in Eritrea.

¶11. (C) Niam described the GoC as "helpful" at this time, and warned that it would be bad for the NRF's interests if Chad were taken over by a pro-GoS regime.

Military Activities at Oure Cassoni Refugee Camp

¶12. (C) When questioned by Poloff about military activities at the camp, which threatened the camp's humanitarian status and could make it a legitimate target, the political representatives claimed that the JEM follows the Geneva Conventions and had in fact just trained its soldiers therein. Niam suggested that even if such activities might have occurred in the past, they were not occurring now.

Comment

¶13. (C) While the JEM genuinely appreciates U.S. support concerning Darfur, and its political representatives said the right things about the DPA as a starting point, and negotiations in general, the bottom line is that rebel unification still looks as remote as when SE Natsios discussed it with rebel leaders back on 19 January (reftel). The kind words for the United States expressed by these representatives did not appear to reflect concerns or even awareness of impending announcements of measures directed at their leadership, but it cannot be ruled out.

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